1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

of cooking dishes and compounding the various ingredients; but on the whole the material provided is of more importance than the cooking. Except that a meal with meat is universally preferred to one without there does not seem to be any particularly favourite food; Tafoor voiced the general opinion when he said his favourite dish was *chi*. I did not get enough detailed menus to be able to state with certainty how often meat is usually eaten inside the household; from such information as I have got I should say richer people eat it three or four times a week, poor people once or twice. When it is available it is eaten in the morning and evening.

Lepcha diet is relatively monotonous, notably less highly spiced than the food of the Nepali or Indians; there are no devices for tempting jaded palates; food is to satisfy hunger, and enough is as bad as a meal. A feast definitely implies over-eating, and it is quite a common subject among old people to deplore that their powers of over-eating are failing; that once upon a time they could eat fourteen pounds of meat in a day, and now they cannot manage four with comfort! These actual figures were used by Adér, who is well over seventy and has lost half his teeth.

As can be seen, the Lepchas have, for a primitive people, a remarkably high standard of living, as far as food and drink is concerned; it is certainly far higher than that of the Lepchas outside Zongu or any of the neighbouring peoples that I know of. Levelling out the answers I have received and my own observations, I should say that the average consumption of grain annually by an adult Lepcha is about 400 lbs.; besides that about another 300 lbs. is consumed for *chi*. These quantities naturally do not allow for entertainment or gifts. There are three households who perhaps do not quite reach this standard, those of Dunbi, Nahyeun and Pargeut. Dunbi is said to be the poorest man in the village, but this is chiefly his own fault, for he sits about drinking and gossiping instead of working. Nahyeun is a young man fairly recently married; he is reputed to be Dunbi's bastard and is himself not over energetic. He recently married Tobgé's sister and they have set up house on their own because his wife did not agree with the two wives of Asang, with whom he formerly lived; they consequently have no reserves and few permanent fields. The third poor man, Pargeut, is really unfortunate; he has six small children of which only the two eldest are of an age to help him, and they are girls betrothed outside the village; he has also a very

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

old mother to support, and he suffers himself from some sort of recurrent fever.

These households, and a few others, may get short of grain in the early summer and be driven to look for food in the forest to supplement the gifts they get; most households have usually a a small surplus at the end of the year which they use for extra feasting and presents. From the point of view of crops, though not necessarily of money, the richest householders are the Mandal, Tafoor, Takneum *youmi*, Tingkep and Chelim. The first two are considered to be the best hosts, at whose house the finest food and drink is obtained.

V

Although of secondary importance as far as diet is concerned, domestic animals play a considerable rôle in the life of the Lepchas. Nearly all the ceremonies of the Mun demand animal sacrifices; animals are essential for the socio-religious celebrations of birth, marriage and death; and consequently people with few or no animals who get ill or have children or marry or die are at a considerable disadvantage and have to borrow animals for these ceremonies. Much of the indebtedness incurred with money lenders has been for the purchase of animals. Though the Lepcha can, and often does, borrow animals from his neighbours, he appears to feel a discomfort in being indebted to a friend which he does not feel towards the money lenders.

By far the most important animal is oxen;[7] they are still the chief sign of wealth and a person with twenty head of cattle is considered a rich man. Their meat is the most esteemed and at important feasts, or if a person wants to make a display, it is always an ox which is killed. They are never used as beasts of burden (no animals are so used) but occasionally for ploughing; a certain amount of milk and butter is got from milch-cows. Only the most savage bulls are castrated. Cows are not mated and no pedigrees are kept.

Except for young calves, milch cows, and bullocks temporarily in use for ploughing, the animals are never tethered or herded; they wander all over the common land round the village where pasturage and wood-gathering are free; every evening they

[7] The Lepcha cattle have no hump; they resemble small European rather than Indian cattle. They have small horns and every variety and combination of colouring.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

law, whose efforts on the latter's estate in Bhutan, as I have seen for myself, have already achieved remarkable results.

The standard of living in Jongu is higher than anywhere else I have seen in India; and I should say that the people are better fed than the average peasant in Central Europe at the present day. As a result of this the Lepchas do not appear to suffer from any of the deficiency diseases, with the possible exception of goitre, which are so common in other parts of the Himalayas. Dysentery, however, is common, and is responsible for the death of many young children: with medical help it could easily be eliminated. There is also a certain amount of avoidable disease through dirt, scabies, sores, and such-like things. It is no exaggeration to say that the people never wash; nor should I if I had to live in their conditions. We Europeans have so recently discovered the comforts of cleanliness that at present we are inclined to overdo the washing business altogether; but there is a happy mean!

But drink is probably the greatest social evil in Jongu; and this, too, may have a bearing on the question of sterility. All the Lepchas, men, women and children, drink far too much; and in Jongu it was unusual to find any adult completely sober in the evening. Fortunately, I personally found *chi* a most unpleasant drink, for it tastes to me like a mixture of sour cider and old ale gone bad; but had I attempted to keep pace with Lepcha hospitality I should by now have been in a home for advanced inebriates: the only defence was to plead teetotalism. A little alcohol, of course, does nobody any harm; but unfortunately the Lepcha is not satisfied with a little. It seems quite impossible for him to drink in moderation.

Of religion little need be said except that in Jongu the Lamas are priests only in name; they have no learning beyond a smattering of Tibetan and are incapable of expounding even the elements of their doctrine. The so-called religious festivals in Jongu were regarded merely as an excuse for having a party; there was nothing spiritual about them.

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

rice as a food. The fact that the offering of sacrifices to the deities concerned with farming was preponderantly a woman's concern, leads us to conclude that farming was originally the work of the women. In the olden days the fields were burnt out in order to prepare them for the plantation. Part of the forest was burnt, cleaned up, and the cultivation of grain would be carried on for one or two years, after which the tribesmen would move away to another area. This is known as shifting cultivation. Today, the burning of fields is controlled by government, lest too much damage be done to the forests. The permanent field system is the common practice today. (Fig. 25-27)

The Rong originally dug up their fields with the use of the hoe, and they did not use the plough. They have taken over the plough only recently from the Indians and the Nepalese. The Lepcha's knowledge of farming was very elementary and they could by no means compete with the Indian and Nepalese farmers. There was a reason behind this. The Lepchas were not totally dependent for their existence on farming, for the collection of roots and plants, and hunting, offered them rich sources of nourishment. A little cattle-breeding goes hand in hand with farming. They keep a few cattle and goats ; sheep are kept very seldom, and at the most one or two pigs. The cattle are the mountain Zebu. The humps of these animals are feebly developed, but for the rest they are strong animals. The Zebu are generally of a black colour. The goats are of a poor variety and have no special breed. The pig, which is different in shape from the black Chinese pig, has as its forbear the black Himalayan boar. The stomach of the pig does not hang down low ; it has small erect ears, a strong mane of bristles, and a long and pointed head. A Lepcha who is well off keeps about eight to ten cattle, and among these are two pairs of oxen for cultivation. The other animals are milk cows and calves. The milk provided by these animals is used mainly for tea ; but occasionally butter is made from it. The number of goats reared is also not very large—ranging from ten to fifteen among the richer folk. The cattle and goats are driven to the grassy slopes for grazing throughout the day and in the evening they return to their stalls. (Fig. 28)